

**§ 3415.12 Conflicts of interest.**

Members of peer review groups covered by this part are subject to relevant provisions contained in title 18 of the United States Code relating to criminal activity, Departmental regulations governing employee responsibilities and conduct (part O of this title), and Executive Order No. 11222, as amended.

**§ 3415.13 Availability of information.**

Information regarding the peer review process will be made available to the extent permitted under the Freedom of Information Act (5 U.S.C. 552), the Privacy Act (5 U.S.C. 552a.), and implementing Departmental regulations (part 1 of this title).

**§ 3415.14 Proposal review.**

(a) All grant applications will be acknowledged. Prior to technical examination, a preliminary review will be made for responsiveness to the program solicitation (e.g., relationship of application to announced program area). Proposals that do not fall within the guidelines as stated in the program solicitation will be eliminated from competition and will be returned to the applicant.

(b) All applications will be carefully reviewed by the Administrator, qualified officers or employees of the Department, the respective peer review group, and *ad hoc* reviewers, as required. Written comments will be solicited from *ad hoc* reviewers when required, and individual written comments and in-depth discussions will be provided by peer review group members prior to recommending applications for funding. Applications will be ranked and support levels recommended within the limitation of total available funding for each research program area as announced in the program solicitation.

(c) No awarding official will make a grant based upon an application covered by this part unless the application has been reviewed in accordance with the provisions of this part and unless said reviewers have made recommendations concerning the scientific merit and relevance to the program of such application.

(d) Except to the extent otherwise provided by law, such recommenda-

tions are advisory only and are not binding on program officers or on the awarding officials of CSREES and ARS.

**§ 3415.15 Evaluation factors.**

In carrying out its review under § 3415.14, the peer review group will take into account the following factors unless, pursuant to § 3415.5(a), different evaluation criteria are specified in the annual program solicitation:

- (a) Scientific merit of the proposal.
  - (1) Conceptual adequacy of hypothesis;
  - (2) Clarity and delineation of objectives;
  - (3) Adequacy of the description of the undertaking and suitability and feasibility of methodology;
  - (4) Demonstration of feasibility through preliminary data;
  - (5) Probability of success of project;
  - (6) Novelty, uniqueness and originality; and
  - (7) Appropriateness to regulation of biotechnology and risk assessment.
- (b) Qualifications of proposed project personnel and adequacy of facilities.
  - (1) Training and demonstrated awareness of previous and alternative approaches to the problem identified in the proposal, and performance record and/or potential for future accomplishments;
  - (2) Time allocated for systematic attainment of objectives;
  - (3) Institutional experience and competence in subject area; and
  - (4) Adequacy of available or obtainable support personnel, facilities, and instrumentation.
- (c) Relevance of project to solving biotechnology regulatory uncertainty for United States agriculture.
  - (1) Scientific contribution of research in leading to important discoveries or significant breakthroughs in announced program areas; and
  - (2) Relevance of the risk assessment research to agriculture and environmental regulations.